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ABSTRACT

One college language teacher's experience in becoming familiar with business German, economics, and the German-speaking business world is described. The training for the business German teacher at Middlebury College included auditing courses in macro- and microeconomics offered at Middlebury college and spending 6 weeks in West Germany to gather materials and to become conversant in business German matters. In West Germany, the teacher contacted individuals in the business community to whom she had been referred, conversed with friends about everyday economic matters, made notes on new concepts and vocabulary, and audited classes in local institutions. The resulting course has been taught four times, with revision and updating. Guest speakers contacted through the state agency on development have been a valuable addition to the course, and alumni German majors invited to visit the class have been well received. On a later trip to West Germany, arrangements were made for the teacher to undertake a series of internships in different companies. It is anticipated that this experience will result in internships and an additional seminar being offered at the home institution. The personal and professional rewards of the 5 years of study, planning, and program implementation are seen as considerable. (MSE)

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In the course of this report I will describe the steps that I, as a teacher of German language, culture, and literature at a small liberal arts college in northern New England, have taken in the past five years to train myself to teach business German courses and to broaden my knowledge of macro- and microeconomics and increase my familiarity with the German-speaking business world. I hope that this case history might serve as a model for other language educators who like me have had little prior experience in business and economics, and who already teach courses in business language or are considering adding such courses to their foreign language curriculum.

Business German courses were first offered at Middlebury College in the context of the graduate summer language program. In the early eighties, Klaus Evard from the European Business School in Oestrich-Winkel, Horst Schumacher of the University of Paris-Nanterre, and Günther Teschauer of the Tenafly (NJ) Public Schools all taught upper-level business and economic German at Middlebury before me. I gave myself and Middlebury undergraduates a modest introduction to the subject matter in the fall of 1982 when in teaching a course called "German in its Cultural Contexts" I included a three-week unit on the West German economy and its banking system. (Other units dealt with the educational system, the political system, and the social structure of the Federal Republic of Germany.) The experience was so positive that I decided to request permission from the Middlebury College Economics Department to audit EC 150 and EC 151 in the spring of 1983. Permission granted, I attended all classes for the courses on macro- and microeconomics, did all the readings, and took all the chapter

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quizzes (although because of other commitments I did not take mid-term or final examinations). Half-way through the semester, besides reading the texts and the professors' handouts, I found myself spending a lot of time in the college library reading U.S. business publications such as The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Fortune, and Forbes and finding numerous articles on the West German economy. Soon I made two decisions: 1) to offer GN 321 Business German and German Business the following fall semester and 2) to spend six weeks in West Germany in May and June of 1983 (preceding the fall semester) devoting myself exclusively to becoming conversant in German on business and economic matters.

While in West Germany that spring, I read whatever materials I could find that dealt in German with business and the economy. I invested in reference books on business and economic terms and became familiar with the business pages of leading German newspapers.

Before flying to West Germany, I had collected from various friends and acquaintances the names and addresses of their friends and relatives in West Germany who had a connection to the West German business scene. Once in West Germany, I made a point of looking these people up. Thus, I called upon and often had lengthy conversations with individuals active in various segments of the West German economy. I talked, for instance, with a couple who run an office supplies and equipment firm - both retail and wholesale -, with a man who with his two sons has a rolled steel company, with a theater impresario, with a patent attorney, and with a stockbroker from the BHF Bank in Frankfurt.

In addition, I found myself conversing with my own German

friends of long standing about their bank accounts, their mortgages, their taxes, and their retirement programs, topics that never before had interested me. Much to my pleasure, I discovered that not only was nearly everyone willing to talk with me about such matters, sometimes divulging information I'm quite sure they normally wouldn't share with their own compatriots, but also all of our discussions very nicely complemented my own reading in Das Handelsblatt, Wirtschaftswoche, Das Capital, and Manager-Magazin. Assiduously, I made copious vocabulary lists for myself and kept a notebook on new concepts I was learning. All this turned out to be my own hands-on experiences, my own on-the-job training, so to speak. I also arranged to audit classes for three days each at both Klaus Evard's European Business School and at the Cologne headquarters of the Carl Duisberg-Centren. My observations at these two organizations helped me to confirm in my own mind that I was making progress and that the approach I was taking was the right one for me.

Thus armed with new knowledge, I began teaching Business German to Middlebury College undergraduates in the fall of 1983. This spring (1988) marks the fourth time (three times during the academic year and once in the summer program) that I've taught the course. I've had as few as 7 and as many as 16 students. The course is constantly evolving. One reason I always enjoy teaching it is that it offers me a renewed opportunity to indulge in a now favorite activity, namely reading both U.S. and German newspapers and business publications. That way, I am also constantly up-dating my materials and, of course, broadening my own knowledge.

Another extremely productive source of information has been a number of guest speakers (both English speakers and German

speakers), whom I've invited to come to give talks to my students. I began in the fall of 1983 by telephoning the Vermont State Agency of Development in Montpelier, our state capital, in search of German firms with subsidiaries in the state. I was lucky enough to get in touch with Louis Dvorzak, Director of Industrial Training, who accepted my invitation to come to Middlebury to describe the state's efforts to attract foreign firms to Vermont. Part of what he does is set up state-run industrial training programs to help Vermont workers meet the demands of actual or potential employers from outside the state, including West Germany, as it turns out. On his first visit, Lou brought along to illustrate his success Peter Heinz, the U.S. head of Karl Suess, a small high-tech German company, whose American subsidiary is located in Waterbury Center, Vermont. Thus began a long string of guest speakers, several of whom have returned each time I give the course. There is quite a bit of work in arranging the dates for the speakers, who often are very busy people and sometimes have to change their appointments, and, of course, the syllabus has to be adjusted and normal class activities have to be suspended when a speaker comes, but the benefits far outweigh any problems. My students are very enthusiastic to have contact with the "real world", as they put it. As for me, a real plus is that I always feel confirmed as a teacher of business German because very frequently, a guest speaker uses vocabulary we've been practicing or emphasizes points already made by me or in our readings. Hence, our "Theorie" is put into "Praxis".

Another useful practice I've instituted is to have Middlebury College alumni German majors return to the campus and speak to the class. The advantages here are that the students can really relate to the alumni, who in the case of my guests have been out of college only 8 to 12 years. The alumni are delighted to be "used" by the

college in this way and have enthusiastically described their experiences working for Deutsche Bank in New York, Kuehne & Nagel in Hamburg, Wella AG in Darmstadt, the Westdeutsche Landesbank in Düsseldorf, the Bayerische Vereinsbank in Chicago, Opel in Rüsselsheim, or General Foods in Frankfurt.

In December 1987, by chance, I discovered that at the same time I was planning a short pre-Christmas trip to Germany some American friends of mine, who own a small, but very successful furniture-manufacturing company in Brandon, Vermont, were also planning to be there. They were combining business with pleasure, and besides attending a wedding, they had made arrangements to visit two companies in Baden-Württemberg - one a small manufacturer of computerized wood-processing machines and the other a manufacturer/supplier of furniture accessories (hinges, clasps, latches, etc.). My friends invited me to accompany them on their tours of these companies, and I had an absolutely fascinating time becoming acquainted with facilities and products from the inside out, and in addition, I enjoyed speaking German with the German hosts, who, even though their English was quite serviceable in making their sales pitch to my companions, were pleased to speak business German with me.

Last winter and spring (1987), fueled by this unplanned, but very positive experience, and coincidentally having been freed of my administrative and secretarial duties vis-à-vis the German School and the German Department, and in possession of my first full-time teaching appointment along with the assurance from the college provost that I was indeed now eligible to apply for a paid leave of absence, I sat down at my Macintosh, also newly acquired, and began brainstorming with myself about leave possibilities. Working with

contacts in Vermont companies I'd already established, studying publications of the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce, reading regularly the Vermont Business Monthly, and making frequent use of my office telephone, I embarked on a project to pay visits to a number of Vermont firms with business connections in Europe, primarily West Germany, but also Austria, and Holland. In March and April 1987, I spent one or two days each week on the road traveling to various parts of the state. Vermont is actually a very small state--200 miles from north to south and no more 150 miles from east to west--, nevertheless, I sometimes had to travel up to three hours to reach a specific company. I even traveled once to New Hampshire and another time to Connecticut to call upon a company. But it was well worth it. I really enjoyed getting to know Vermont (and New England) in this very different way, and through my on-site visits I discovered a great variety of products and much business contact with Europe. Most of the companies were willing to put me in touch with their European counterparts. I made it very clear to the individuals I met in the various companies that my goals involved achieving opportunities for myself and my students to become more knowledgeable about business German and German business. I found a great deal of support and enthusiasm for my cause. Very concretely, I requested names, addresses, and telephone numbers and asked the Americans to make the initial contact for me with their European business partners. Then I followed up, usually first by telephone and afterward by letter.

By the time May and June 1987 came and I was ready to fly to Europe, exactly four years had passed since my first total immersion experience in business German; prior to leaving, I had arranged appointments at nine different European firms. I felt very informed about each of the companies I was to visit because in most cases I'd

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toured the facilities in Vermont (or New Hampshire or Connecticut), examined their products, and had talked with company employees on this side of the Atlantic. Once in Europe, I followed a rigorous schedule and visited the Van Houton Chocolate Company in Holland just across the border from Aachen, now a subsidiary of Jacob-Suchard in Switzerland (Van Houton in the U.S. has a plant in St. Albans, Vermont, that I had already visited); Niggermann, a food wholesaler and food services equipment company in Bochum, a distributor for Blodgett Ovens in Burlington, Vermont, and Pizer Fryers in Concord, New Hampshire; the Austrian manufacturing facility of Burton Snowboards of Manchester Center, Vermont, as well as Burton's West German distributor, Frowein GmbH in Albstadt (Baden-Württemberg); two clothing manufacturers (Bogner in Munich and Geiger in Schwaz, Austria), both of which have sizeable plants in Vermont; a small high-tech company in Garching outside Munich, the parent of Karl Suess of Waterbury Center, Vermont; Trumpf in Ditzingen outside Stuttgart, a manufacturer of sophisticated computer and laser-driven metal-processing machines, the parent company of Trumpf of America in Farmington, Connecticut; and through Berthold Leibinger, the Trumpf CEO who is also the current president of the Stuttgart Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Industrie- und Handelskammer Mittlerer Neckar), I also spent a day becoming acquainted with the workings of the largest regional West German chamber of commerce; and last, but not least, Daimler-Benz AG in Sindelfingen and Untertürkheim also near Stuttgart. This last visit was arranged through a personal contact I'd long had, but had never actively pursued: the brother of a long-time German friend of mine is treasurer of Daimler-Benz.

In the course of my visits, wherever and whenever it seemed appropriate, I broached the subject of doing an internship with the

company sometime during the 1988-89 academic year. I proposed spending six to eight weeks in the company moving from department to department to become familiar with the work done in each and with the language used in carrying out the tasks involved. I received a warm response, and now, having written everything up and submitted it to the Middlebury College Teaching Resources Committee as a leave proposal, which subsequently was approved, I am looking forward to doing four internships, beginning in late August: two in Munich and two in Stuttgart. In Munich I will intern at Karl Suess and at Bogner, in Stuttgart at Trumpf and at the Stuttgart Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Besides expanding my own scope with regard to the West German economy and business scene, I have two further projects as I look ahead to the coming academic year as well as the year following, when I will be director of studies for the Middlebury program in Mainz. First, I am working with the Middlebury College Alumni Office and with our Director of Career Counseling and Placement to establish internships (of longer duration) and externships (of shorter duration) for Middlebury undergraduates at various European firms. This program, we hope, will begin in January 1991 in our one-month Winter Term. I am also preparing to teach a senior-level seminar focusing on the German economy and German business, which I propose to offer for the first time in the fall of 1991 upon my return to the classroom.

As I look back over the past five years, I am pleased to realize how much my knowledge of business German and German business has increased. I've really enjoyed devising my own approach to learning this new field, and I look forward to even greater

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hand-on-experience and on-the-job training next year in Europe.

I'd like to conclude this report by observing that--as I see it--there are four primary reasons why I've had considerable success in pursuing my interests in business German and German business: 1) I'm an American with very good, albeit not perfect skills in German; 2) I'm a middle-aged woman who surprisingly is interested in and knowledgeable about the German economy and business scene; 3) I have an Anglo-Saxon name; 4) I strike a chord of positive response among my German business conversation partners who in working with me like to see themselves not only furthering their own interests in international trade but also at the same time promoting the dual causes of young people and international understanding.